



# Finding Contaminated Properties in Wisconsin: On-Line And Print Resources

PUB-RR-673

March, 2006

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) maintains several lists of contaminated properties that are available to the public. Through the DNR's Remediation and Redevelopment (RR) Program, the public can access these lists on-line via the Internet, or obtain other helpful information through printed resources.

## Inside This Fact Sheet...

The primary database for contaminated properties in the state is the DNR's Bureau for Remediation and Redevelopment Tracking System, or BRRTS. *BRRTS on the Web* makes the information in BRRTS more user-friendly and accessible via the Internet.

For more information about *BRRTS on the Web*, please see page 3.

The *GIS Registry of Closed Remediation Sites* is a subset of *BRRTS on the Web* and is another popular database. The *GIS Registry* only contains information about properties where cleanups have been approved, yet some residual contamination remains.

For more information about the *GIS Registry*, please see page 4.

## A Contaminated "Site" Vs. A Contaminated Property – What's The Difference?

1. *BRRTS on the Web* shows contaminated "sites," where a discharge to the environment has occurred. However, contamination does not respect property lines, and a contaminated "site" may be either smaller than or larger than a "property," which is defined by a deed.
2. The *GIS Registry* has a different purpose than *BRRTS on the Web*. Instead of listing contaminated sites, the Registry lists properties where cleanup has been completed and approved, and where some residual contamination could impact future land use and well construction. The Registry lists properties where the contamination originated, as well as other properties to which contamination has spread.

**Please Note!** Approval of a site cleanup does not mean that an entire property has been evaluated for contamination.



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<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/aw/rr>



## **Should I worry about possible environmental contamination at a property in which I am interested?**

It depends. Whether a property is contaminated is rarely a simple “yes or no” question. Many completed environmental cleanups have met Wisconsin standards, been approved, but still may have some residual contamination. Properties with residual contamination are not necessarily bad investments – in fact, the re-use of these properties has helped drive economic revitalization in many cities. There are grants, loans and liability protections available for contaminated properties that did not exist in the past.

We don’t need to clean up the last molecules of contamination before approving a cleanup. Some contaminants naturally break down over time – through a process called “natural attenuation”. Other types of contamination do not make a significant impact on public health or the environment and can be controlled – through a soil cap or other type of barrier, for example – rather than removed.

Of course, you would want to know about any contamination that may exist on the property you’re interested in, and our databases can help you find out. We have three basic categories of records in our on-line databases:

- sites with an “open” status in *BRRTS on the Web* – these sites are somewhere in the investigation and cleanup process, and contaminant cleanup has not been approved;
- sites with a “closed” status in *BRRTS on the Web* – cleanup has been completed and approved; there may or may not be some residual contamination; and
- sites in the *GIS Registry of Closed Remediation Sites* – cleanup has been approved; however this database provides more information about residual contamination in soil and/or groundwater for specific sites.

## **Who will find these on-line databases helpful, and why?**

Local government officials, buyers, lenders, developers, realtors and others can use *BRRTS on the Web* and the *GIS Registry* to find contaminated sites and to obtain basic information about the contaminants and the cleanup. Environmental consultants can use the databases to find sources of contamination in areas where they are working.

Often contaminated properties are available for purchase and redevelopment at desirable locations, whether or not cleanups have been completed. The department encourages land use that reduces sprawl and applies redevelopment options where infrastructure such as roads and utilities is already available. This type of redevelopment can lead to financial resources, such as brownfields grants, that are not available at other locations.

For information about financial resources, please see *The Financial Resource Guide for Cleanup and Redevelopment* (publication #RR-539). This publication, as well as other on-line funding information, can be found at <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/aw/rr/financial>.

## What if I need assurance that nothing else needs to be cleaned up?

DNR's Voluntary Party Liability Exemption (VPLE) process evaluates entire properties for environmental liability, provides detailed oversight of the environmental investigation and cleanup, and offers a Certificate of Completion that provides limits on future liability. The certificate may be transferred to future property owners, helping them feel comfortable that the entire property has been investigated and cleaned up to the satisfaction of DNR. You can find more information about the VPLE process in *Fact Sheet 2: Voluntary Party Remediation and Exemption from Liability* (publication #RR-506) at <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/aw/rr/archives/pubs/RR506.pdf>.



## What if I need to know more about a property?

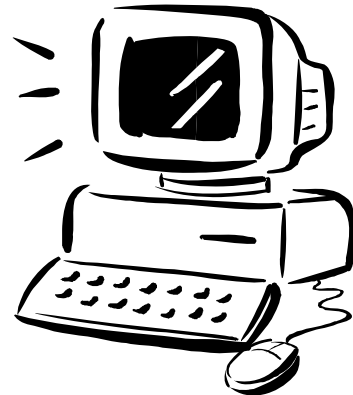
More detailed information on contaminated sites is located in files in DNR regional offices. Our web site includes a list of staff names, telephone numbers, email addresses and assigned counties. Please use the "Staff" button on our main web page to find staff information at [http://dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/rr/technical/lists/contact\\_rr.htm](http://dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/rr/technical/lists/contact_rr.htm).

## Contaminated Land Databases

### ***BRRTS on the Web***

(<http://botw.dnr.state.wi.us/botw/Welcome.do>)

The Bureau for Remediation and Redevelopment Tracking System (BRRTS) is a database of sites where the DNR, the Department of Commerce and the Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection (DATCP) provide oversight and approvals of the cleanup of contaminated soil and groundwater. The Department of Commerce approves some cleanups from petroleum tanks, while DATCP approves agri-chemical cleanups. *BRRTS on the Web* includes all hazardous substance discharges that have been reported to the state in accordance with the law (Chapter 292, Wis. Stats.), but does not provide information about discharges that have never been reported.



*BRRTS on the Web* gives you:

- thousands of contaminated sites, including spills, leaking tanks, dry cleaner solvents, Superfund sites, etc.;
- properties that may or may not be contaminated and where DNR has made environmental liability determinations;
- locations where underground storage tanks have been removed without needing cleanup, or where other assessments have indicated no contamination problem; and

- locations where an entire property has been investigated and cleaned up and DNR has issued a transferable Certificate of Completion limiting environmental liability.

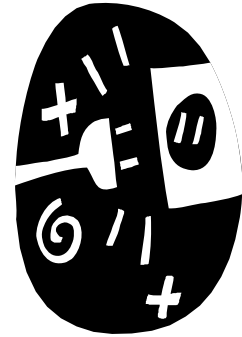
In addition, *BRRTS on the Web* provides:

- a search capability to find sites by county, city or a specific location;
- a list of investigation and remediation activities conducted at each site; and
- names of companies and state staff associated with sites.

## ***GIS Registry of Closed Remediation Sites***

(<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/rr/gis>)

The *GIS Registry* is a searchable state map that lets users click on locations to find specific properties with residual contamination. These are completed and approved environmental cleanups. If a site appears in the *GIS Registry*, it means that no further cleanup is required, but:



- some contamination remains above groundwater standards, and special well construction requirements may apply; and/or
- residual soil contamination remains that needs to be properly handled if soil is excavated, or if a required soil cover is not maintained. The soil information applies only to cleanups approved after August 1, 2002. Previous approvals with contaminated soil have a deed notice instead of a listing on the *GIS Registry*.

Properties can be removed from the *GIS Registry* if the owner provides DNR with new information showing that the contamination has decreased and now meets state standards.

Here's what else you can find in the *GIS Registry*:

- GIS data at your fingertips, with topography, lakes and rivers, roads and railroads;
- links to scanned documents, including property deeds and cleanup approval letters;
- residual soil and groundwater contaminant maps;
- other nearby properties that still have some related environmental impacts;
- links to *BRRTS on the Web* information with the dates of activities; and
- search options that help find locations by county, city or village names.

**Remember!** The *GIS Registry* does not provide information about sites that are still in the clean-up process. Those sites are found in *BRRTS on the Web*.

## **Other Contaminated Land Information**

DNR also has other historic lists of contaminated or potentially contaminated sites.

- ***The Registry of Waste Disposal Sites in Wisconsin***  
<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/rr/archives/pubs/RR108.pdf>

In the early 1980s, the Wisconsin Legislature required DNR to create a list of abandoned landfills. It became a broad catalog of sites with reports – some unverified – of solid waste activity (e.g. active and inactive landfills, demolition disposal sites, old burn pits). Over the years, this list has been expanded, modified and re-named. It's currently called the *Registry of Waste Disposal Sites*. The *Registry of Waste Disposal Sites* was last updated in 1999. New entries are no longer made because sites that require environmental work are now added to *BRRTS on the Web*. DNR staff are currently undertaking a review of all sites listed in this Registry to determine whether further environmental investigation may be needed.

- ***Superfund Sites In Wisconsin***

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/rr/archives/pubs/RR005.pdf>

Since the 1980s, the DNR has been a partner with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in managing the investigation and cleanup of sites on the Superfund National Priority List (NPL). Currently 38 sites in Wisconsin are on the NPL.

### ***Friendly Reminders***

- The DNR databases are not comprehensive. They can only include contamination that DNR staff is aware of. Sites are added to *BRRTS on the Web* as they are discovered.
- All spills and discharges to the environment must be reported to the DNR as required by law. If you see a spill or dumping that you believe has not been reported, please immediately call DNR's 24-hour Spill Hot Line at **1-800-943-0003**.

### ***Other Helpful Publications***

- *Re News* is a quarterly newsletter produced by the RR program. The newsletter has the latest news on remediation and redevelopment, including brownfields, dry cleaner reimbursement, superfund, spills cleanup, new publications, and more.
  - *RR Report* is RR's electronic newsletter (listserv) and a means for us to send short, timely updates to our subscribers, such as new rule development, forms, guidance, procedures and more.
- ⇒ To subscribe to either *Re News* or the *RR Report* please visit:  
<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/rr/general/listserv.html>
- ***Environmental Contamination Basics*** (publication # RR-674): basic information about the RR Program and what to do if you discover contamination on your property:  
<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/rr/archives/pubs/RR674.pdf>

This document may contain some information about certain state statutes and rules but does not necessarily include all of the details found in the statutes/rules. Readers should consult the actual language of the statutes/rules to answer specific questions.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources provides equal opportunity in its employment, programs, services, and functions under an Affirmative Action Plan. If you have any questions, please write to Equal Opportunity Office, Department of Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

This publication is available in alternative format upon request. Please call 608-267-3543 for more information.

